Nathan Brinling

AP Literature and Composition

Mr. Lane

5 October 2009

Rainsford in Action

“The Most Dangerous Game” is a short story about hunting, life, and human nature. Rainsford is a convincing character that changes throughout the story. He stays true to his nature and acts like a hunter. Rainsford is believable because he stays consistent with what background information is known, he is sufficiently motivated by circumstances in his decision making, and the story allows a sufficient time frame for the change to take place and still be plausible.

The first criteria while considering if a character is convincing is for the character to be consistent with an individual’s characterization as dramatized in the story. Rainsford is a world-renowned hunter. He has written many books on the subject and is knowledgeable when hunting big-game. When Rainsford reaches the island, after falling off the ship, he has enough skill to navigate his way through the forest. It is apparent from the beginning the story that Rainsford is very skilled at hunting.

When Rainsford meets General Zaroff, he recognizes the General from a book about hunting. He and the General exchange pleasantries over cocktails. While Zaroff tells Rainsford about “The Most Dangerous Game,” he is enthused about the prospect of new game to hunt. Rainsford asks a few questions about this game but is naïve to General Zaroff’s desires. When the protagonist first realizes what Zaroff has been doing on the island, Rainsford is appalled. Rainsford is thrust into a major decision: to be the hunted by the general for three days or be killed instantly. He makes the choice to be the hunted and hopes to survive in the jungle. Rainsford stays true to his hunting roots and uses many old tactics to fool the General. The hunted man is put through hell to achieve his goal. The actions and tactical skill Rainsford uses in the forest is consistent with the characterization dramatized in the story.

Rainsford is not happy with the general’s motives and views Zaroff as a nemesis. If given the circumstances, most people would not have enough experience to put up a fight against the general. Rainsford is an experienced hunter and has plenty of knowledge to his advantage. He is stuck in the jungle warding off Zaroff for three days. These seventy-two hours are painful and agonizing. The Hunter repeats to himself, “I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve” (Connell 80), to keep himself calm. The thought of someone trying to another person for three days is tough to imagine. It is acceptable for Rainsford to fight back against the General. Surviving in the jungle for three days, the hunter is sufficiently motivated to fight back.

Spending three days as prey for another human is a very scary thought. The duration of time Rainsford spends fighting off Zaroff convinces the Hunted to become the Hunter at the end of the three days. Rainsford faces many breathtaking circumstances during Zaroff’s hunt. The narrator describes the following as the hunter hid in a tree: “Rainsford held his breath. The general’s eyes left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree” (Connell 81). Rainsford has gone without a good meal and a good night’s sleep for too long. Rainsford has a right to be mad after being chased down through the forest as a hunted animal. The time the hunter is given to change his mind about the idea of killing humans is substantial considering the challenges Zaroff has put him through. The decision Rainsford makes is believable in the context and timeframe of the story.

Many would argue that Rainsford has ethics in his fight against the general, but one must remember the long duration of time the hunted had to build up angst against the hunter. Such a long period of restless nights, little food, and lack of comfort would make most go wild. Most would not fare well living in the jungle, but Rainsford is well-acquainted with his surroundings. When Rainsford says, “I am still a beast at bay” (Connell 85), his adrenaline is so high that he wants to fight more. After three days of acting as the hunted, Rainsford decides to be the hunter.

Another counter-argument to the credibility of Rainsford’s character is the implausibility of the whole story. What are the chances that a world-renowned hunter falls off a boat and swims to the shore of an island where a general hunts humans? The premise of the story may seem too coincidental to be true, but the set-up of the story pulls the reader in so well that one does not notice these major coincidences. One must remember this is a work of fiction. The story is unlikely, yet it’s plausible considering Rainsford has the background and experience to beat Zaroff at his own game.

Rainsford meets the criteria for a convincing character. The background of the protagonist explains his success in fighting in the forest, while he is sufficiently motivated to fight back against Zaroff after the long three day fight is over. The three days Rainsford is given to accomplish his task is more than enough time to develop a change in morals and ethics. His situation leads him to desperate measures.

Works Cited

Arp, Thomas R., and Greg Johnson. Perrine's Literature. Boston: Thomas Wadsworth, 2006.